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....Memorial of Dr. Joseph M. Toner

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MEMORIAL OF DR. JOSEPH M. TONER.

By Ainsworth R. Spofford.

Among the many familiar faces which we have been wont to see gathered in the scientific, literary, and professional assemblies of Washington, there has been no more striking or familiar presence than that of Dr. Joseph M. Toner. Cast physically in a frame of ample mold, with broad, full features, and a massive bald head, his mobile countenance ever ready to relax into a smile, he was a man of marked and engaging and impressive personality.

In attempting to summarize, however briefly and imperfectly, some estimate of our late associate, of his mental characteristics, and of the work which he has done in the world, we may view him in various aspects. We may consider him, first of all, as a student and investigator. He had from very early years a notable zeal for knowledge, and this, unlike the experience of many men who become absorbed in professional routine, may be said to have grown with him through life. Born in 1825 of good old Pennsylvania farmer's stock, the slender intellectual advantages of his boyhood were supplemented by a course of one year at the Western Pennsylvania University and two years at St. Mary's College, in Maryland. Choosing the medical profession for a career, he spent two years at two medical colleges, one in Vermont and the other, Jefferson Medical College, at Philadelphia, taking his degree of doctor of medicine from each. These studious years gave him a considerable knowledge of medical and hygienic literature, and after a brief residence at Harpers Ferry in the practice of his profession, he removed to Washington for a wider field in the year 1855. Here he at once entered upon a practice which became extensive in a very few years. But his habits of mind gave him so strong a bent toward scientific, historical, and literary pursuits that he almost wholly relinquished the active practice of his profession during the later years of his life, prescribing only for the families of a few friends.

Dr. Toner had some admirable qualities in matters of research. His perceptive faculties were quick, his grasp of principles firm, and his devotion to truth was paramount. He weighed evidence and authorities with care, and was often known to change his judgment formed on first impressions upon maturer investigation. At the same time, he

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had that strong tendency to build up theories which is common t fertile minds, and had to abandon many which experience and observa tion failed to substantiate. Perhaps the leading characteristic of hi pursuit of scientific subjects was assiduity rather than originality. H pursued every subject which interested him, especially in later years with an energy which sought out all the means of elucidation within his reach, and he was not satisfied until he had seen and weighed what ever there might be in books and periodicals upon the topic in hand.

We may view him next as a writer, and his contributions to the press were neither few nor small. His first little book, "Maternal Instinct," printed in 1864, at Baltimore, was a serious discussion of the functions and the duties of motherhood, and evinced his earnest bent toward practical views of life. His second book, a "Dictionary of Elevations and Climatic Register of the United States," published at Washington in 1874, was more important. It was the first attempt, so far as known, to put before the public in book form and in alphabetical order the heights above sea level of all cities, towns, and mountains which could be ascertained. These were scattered through very numerous sources of information, in periodicals, Government reports, etc., and to gather them together involved protracted and patient labor, for which Dr. Toner's assiduous zeal in pursuit of a cherished object well qualified him. The book, as published, is open to the drawback that the reader has to consult two alphabets instead of one, and this was caused by the material growing upon him after he had printed off a large portion of the work, which forms the first alphabet. This may be regarded as an object lesson to authors and compilers not to be too hasty in going to press, observing the Horatian rule of a nine years' incubation rather than to bring out an immature production, ever mindful of the Roman maxim, "Litera scripta manet." Still, it is most creditable to the subject of our notice to have been the pioneer in a field of scientific research which has had many more recent publications, under the auspices of various bureaus of the Government connected with military, geological, and geodetic surveys.

In the field of medical and hygienic literature Dr. Toner published, in 1874, "Contributions to the Annals of Medical Progress and Medical Education in the United States," which was brought out by the Bureau of Education. Shortly after appeared his "Address before the Rocky Mountain Medical Association," afterwards expanded into a volume (Washington, 1877), and abounding in historical and biographical material concerning early American physicians and surgeons. He very early made it a special object to collect from the most widely scattered sources all the information existing relating to the men of his profession during the period of the American Revolution. It was this pursuit, occupying several years' labor, which first gave him that strong bent toward historical, and especially biographical, investigations, which finally absorbed nearly all of his time and energies. To gather this

material he went laboriously through the nine folio volumes of Force's American Archives, all the histories of the Revolutionary period, military journals, and personal memoirs, and medical and periodical publications without number. The result was seen in his volume entitled "The Medical Men of the Revolution," containing sketches of the lives and services of nearly twelve hundred physicians and surgeons, an invaluable compilation, which is highly regarded by the profession. He also wrote a "Necrology of the Physicians of the Late War," and "Statistics of the Public Health Associations of the United States."

Dr. Toner at one time made a special study of epidemics, collecting every book and pamphlet on which he could lay hands, and he published the results of his studies in several pamphlets on cholera, smallpox, inoculation, vaccination, and yellow fever. One of his contributions to hygienic literature was "Free parks and camping grounds in summer for the children of the poor in large cities," a pamphlet twice printed, which urges in forcible style the merits of that charity which has organized the "fresh-air funds" in so many cities, and which constitutes one of the best and most useful forms of practical beneficence. One of his incidental contributions to history was "Notes on the burning of theaters and public halls," (1876), occasioned doubtless by the burning of the National Theater in this city. This publication embodies a long and melancholy chronicle of the conflagration of buildings devoted to public assemblies, so often fatal to human life, enforcing the lesson which is never learned, that the sole safety of the community lies in building public edifices fireproof in every part.

In the later years of his life the zeal and energy of Dr. Toner's active mind were largely concentrated upon one subject—the writings and the military and civil career of George Washington. To this he devoted money and time almost literally without stint. The fruits of his Washingtonian researches, which have been embodied in permanent form, comprise more than a dozen books and pamphlets, besides numerous articles in historical and literary magazines and in newspapers. Among the latter were "Wills of the American ancestors of George Washington," in the New England Genealogical Register (1891); "George Washington as an inventor and promoter of the useful arts," published in the memorial volume of the Centenary Celebration of the Patent System in the United States in 1891; "Washington's neighbors;" "The home of Washington;" "Excerpts from the account books of George Washington;" Washington's youth and early career;" "Kith and kin of Washington," and "Some account of George Washington's library and manuscript records, and their dispersion from Mount Vernon," issued by the American Historical Association as a part of its annual papers for 1893. The latter furnishes the only systematic account ever published of the remarkable history of the Washington manuscripts, widely scattered as they are, and it is of permanent value. Besides his own contributions illustrative of the personal and public history of Washington, his char-

acter, habits, social and domestic relations, etc., Dr. Toner edited and published no less than five of Washington's original journals and other writings. These include Washington's "Rules of civility and decent behavior in company and conversation" (1888); "Journal of George Washington's journey over the mountains, beyond the Blue Ridge, in 1847–48" (1892); "The daily journal of Maj. George Washington on a tour from Virginia to the island of Barbadoes in 1751–2" (1892); "Journal of Col. George Washington, across the Alleghany Mountains in 1754" (1893), and "Diary of Colonel Washington for August, September, and October, 1774" (1893). All of these were accompanied by copious notes elucidating the text, describing the topography of the regions traversed by Washington in his various expeditions, identifying the various persons referred to in the narrative, and supplying references to books and authorities bearing upon any of the incidents involved. In some cases these notes far exceed the text in volume, and they are invaluable aids to the historical inquirer. In the case of the Barbadoes journal, Dr. Toner went through all the literature to be found relating to that island, giving lists of the settlers and describing the persons and places visited by the youthful Washington (then 20 years of age) so far as possible.

We may now consider the subject of our sketch as a collector of books and of historical material. The passion of collecting, so common among men of literary tastes and habits of research, but which is so seldom carried to the utilization of their stores by the collectors, was, in the case of Dr. Toner, very early developed after he came to Washington. He was for forty years a familiar figure in nearly all the bookstores, book auctions, and junk shops of this and of some other cities, and though reputed a close buyer, he expended largely in amassing medical, historical, and biographical literature. While his specialty at first was medical science, it soon became enlarged to embrace local history in general and what related to the city of Washington and the District of Columbia in particular. He came to be well known as an authority widely consulted upon matters relating to the national capital.

The writer well remembers the zeal and eagerness of the Doctor, on our first acquaintance in 1862, to avail himself of whatever his friend could contribute to his information respecting the authors, editions, and prices of books. From that time on, the ample mansion on Louisiana avenue was the constant recipient of ever fresh stores of books, pamphlets, and periodicals. In the pursuit of his special object, the biography of early American physicians up to the Revolution, he was gradually led to amass material which ultimately developed into a far wider field, namely, first, the personal history of all American physicians, and, secondly, the biography of all Americans inclusively. He carried out the idea of collecting these materials to a much farther point than is customary even among the most assiduous collectors. His aim included the exploiting of a neglected field. Leaving to larger library collections and to fuller purses the amassing of a great library of biographies, he

set to work to gather up the obscure and forgotten facts, the *disjecta membra* of his subject. With this aim he, for several years, had all the exchanges of the newspaper offices searched for obituary notices appearing from day to day, cut up the contents of biographical dictionaries and directories of Congress, and ransacked all periodicals for biographical sketches. The immense mass of material thus gathered he had mounted upon uniform sheets of paper and arranged in strict alphabetical order, thus embodying for the readiest reference a great mass of fugitive biographical data quite inaccessible to the ordinary inquirer. This valuable index, arranged in two extensive cases of drawers, forms a part of the Toner collection in the Congressional Library.

In like manner the Doctor made another collection of obituaries and biographical sketches of all American physicians commemorated in periodicals.

But the specially cherished design, very nearly fulfilled, of the latter years of his life was the collection of an absolutely complete assemblage of all the letters and other writings, printed and manuscript, of George Washington. Dr. Toner had an idea that everything which Washington wrote was valuable, or would become so, to his countrymen. He found that the printed collections of Washington's writings by Sparks and others, who permitted themselves to amend the grammar, the style, and the orthography of their illustrious subject, are quite untrustworthy as transcripts of what he really wrote. So he had strictly verbatim copies made of every paper in the vast collection of the Department of State, and followed it up by securing exact copies of every original Washington letter found in historical societies and library collections, public and private, throughout this country and in Europe. Where no access to an original could be had, he procured and mounted printed copies, ransacking all American books, periodicals and newspapers he could find, and watching every print of a Washington letter, to seize it for his collection, if not already there. This great thesaurus of Washingtoniana, much the fullest yet gathered in any one collection, he arranged in strict chronological order of the papers, and deposited it in his lifetime in the Congressional Library. Thus was performed a most useful and inestimable service to the historical student.

We may next view our associate as a patron of letters and a public benefactor. He founded and endowed in 1872 a course of public lectures, designed to encourage the discovery of new truths for the advancement of medical science. He conveyed about $3,000 in real and personal property to five trustees, consisting of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, the Surgeon-General of the United States Army, the Surgeon-General of the Navy, the president of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, instituting thereby "The Toner lecture fund." Ninety per cent of the interest of the fund was to be applied for at least two annual memoirs or essays by different indi-

viduals relative to some branch of medical science, to be read in the city of Washington, under the name of "The Toner lectures," each of these memoirs or lectures to contain some new truth fully established by experiment or observation."

As these lectures were intended to increase and diffuse knowledge, several of them were accepted for publication in the Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections. The first of the course was by Dr. J. J. Woodward, "On the structure of cancerous tumors," and was printed in 1873. Nine other lectures, by Dr. C. E. Brown-Sequard, Dr. J. M. Da Costa, Dr. W. Adams, Dr. E. O. Shakespeare, Dr. G. E. Waring, jr., Dr. C. K. Mills, and Dr. Harrison Allen, have since been published by the Institution, the last having appeared in 1890. The original fund, of which one-tenth of the annual interest was to be added to the principal and the residue devoted to an honorarium for the lecturers, has grown to over $5,000 by careful investment. It affords a practical example of a wise method of endowment by which even a small sum may be made to yield instruction to large audiences for a series of years.

Dr. Toner gave a gold medal for three years to proficient students in Jefferson College, and a similar medal for many years past, known as the Toner medal, has been awarded at Georgetown University, for the best essay upon some topic in natural science.

His most notable public benefaction, however, was his gift in 1882 of his entire private library to the Government, the first, and thus far the sole instance of any considerable collection being thus bestowed by any private citizen. The gift, comprising about 27,000 volumes—medical, historical, and miscellaneous—besides a multitude of pamphlets and periodicals, was accepted by a special act of Congress, and a bust of Dr. Toner, executed in marble by J. Q. A. Ward, was ordered by the Library Committee, and is placed, with the admirable full-length oil portrait of him by E. F. Andrews, in the Library.

Dr. Toner, in addition to this gift in his lifetime, bequeathed by will all his remaining books, manuscripts, pictures, and curios to the Library of Congress, while to the Cambria County Medical Association, at Johnstown, Pa., he has given all duplicates of his books and periodicals.

The Toner collection, while of course it largely duplicates what is already in the Congressional Library, also supplements that collection in many important directions, especially in medical journals, while the special and unique collections in biography and Washingtoniana, already referred to, give to it a great and permanent value. It has been catalogued, excepting a portion of its pamphlets and serials, and while hitherto it has never been adequately or even respectably stored, because of the utter want of room in the Capitol, a place of honor in a corner pavilion of the new Library building, selected by Dr. Toner, will be devoted to the arrangement and preservation of his collection.

It may be hoped that other collectors of valuable libraries and of

manuscripts may emulate the laudable example here set, and perpetuate their names and render their collections in the highest degree useful by endowing the American public, through its Government Library, with the valuable stores which they may no longer use.

Dr. Toner was honored by being chosen president of several societies, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, each of the two Medical societies of the District of Columbia, the Literary society, the Columbia Historical Society, the Washington National Monument Society, etc. He was offered, but declined, professorships in medical colleges, preferring a more comprehensive field of labor.

In the last few years Dr. Toner had suffered occasionally from internal derangement of certain organs, evincing that his naturally strong constitution was being slowly undermined. But he worked on, putting the best face upon the visitations of disease, until the summer of 1896, when he was in the midst of his vacation at Cresson Springs, Pa., where he suddenly breathed his last, seated in his easy chair, on the 31st of August, 1896.

In conclusion, all who knew him will concur with me that the seventy years of our departed friend and brother represent an earnest, laborious, and highly useful life. To few men, indeed, is it given to win so much of public respect and honor; so much, also, of more tender regard and sympathy. His genial companionship, his warm and widely dispensed hospitality, and his encouraging presence and aid in every good word and work, will be widely missed and long remembered in the city of Washington.

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